United Nations S/PV 4124

Security Council
Fifty-fifth Year

Provisional

4124th Meeting
Friday, 7 April 2000, 10.30 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Axworthy	(Canada)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Listre
	Bangladesh	Mr. Ahmed
	China	Mr. Wang Yingfan
	France	Mr. Levitte
	Jamaica	Mr. Ward
	Malaysia	Mr. Kamal
	Mali	Mr. Ouane
	Namibia	Mr. Andjaba
	Netherlands	Mr. van Walsum
	Russian Federation	Mr. Lavrov
	Tunisia	Mr. Jerandi
	Ukraine	Mr. Yel'chenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Eldon
	United States of America	Mr. Holbrooke

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General (S/2000/205)

00-38253 (E)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-178.

The meeting was called to order at 11.45 a.m.

Expression of sympathy in connection with the death of the former President of Tunisia

The President: At the outset of the meeting, I should like, on behalf of the Council, to express grief and sorrow at the passing of His Excellency Mr. Habib Bourguiba, leader and former President of the Republic of Tunisia. As the father of Tunisia and as one of the architects of the Organization of African Unity, President Bourguiba was deeply committed to the cause of peace, and was an embodiment of the hopes and aspirations of generations of men and women in Tunisia and throughout Africa.

On behalf of the Council, I should like to request the representative of Tunisia to convey to the bereaved family and to the Government and the people of Tunisia our profound condolences.

Mr. Tekaya (Tunisia) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Mr. President, and the other members of the Security Council for your expression of sympathy with the Government and the people of Tunisia in connection with the death of our leader, President Habib Bourguiba, the father of independent Tunisia. History will never forget the great work he accomplished in Tunisia or that he was a fervent advocate of just causes, supporting independence movements in Africa and throughout the world. He was among the founders of the Organization of African Unity and of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. He was a great believer in a culture of peace, tolerance and the peaceful settlement of disputes.

May God have mercy upon him.

Expression of thanks to the retiring President

The President: As this is the first meeting of the Security Council for the month of April, I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute, on behalf of the Council, to His Excellency Mr. Anwarul Karim Chowdhury, Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations, for his service as President of the Security Council for the month of March 2000. I am sure I speak for all members of the Security Council in expressing deep appreciation to Ambassador Chowdhury for the great diplomatic skill with which he conducted the Council's business last month.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General (S/2000/205)

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Afghanistan, in which he requests to be invited to participate in the discussion of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the discussion, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Farhâdi (Afghanistan) took a seat at the Council table.

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, and in the absence of objection, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. John Renninger, Officer-in-Charge of the Asia and the Pacific Division of the Department of Political Affairs.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite Mr. Renninger to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, document S/2000/205, and a letter dated 4 April 2000 from the Chairman of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1267 (1999) concerning Afghanistan addressed to the President of the Council, document S/2000/282.

Members of the Council have also received photocopies of the report of the United Nations Interagency Gender Mission to Afghanistan, which took place from 12 to 24 November 1997.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. John Renninger, Officer-in-Charge of the Asia and the Pacific Division of the Department of Political Affairs, on the situation in Afghanistan. I call on Mr. Renninger.

Mr. Renninger: The Afghan conflict has now entered into its twenty-second year without any tangible hope for a solution in the foreseeable future. The suffering of the Afghan people continues unabated. It is also disturbing to note that the negative effects of the conflict have begun to spread beyond the borders of Afghanistan. Other countries in the region and beyond already suffer from the spillover of many Afghan-based problems, including the flood of refugees, narcotics and arms smuggling, as well as cross-border activities related to terrorism. On behalf of the Secretary-General, I therefore welcome this opportunity to express our concerns before the Council and to benefit from the suggestions and observations of the Governments which are attending today's meeting.

As members of the Council are aware, the most recent quarterly report of the Secretary-General on Afghanistan was issued on 17 March. In my briefing today, I will provide an update on recent political and military developments affecting Afghanistan and I shall also focus on humanitarian aspects and human rights, including the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan.

Let me start with recent political developments. The talks involving the Taliban movement and the United Front, which took place from 7 to 9 March in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, under the auspices of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), have already been noted in the Secretary-General's recent report. During the talks, neither side changed its basic position. While the Taliban insisted that the opposition had to join the Islamic Emirate and to accept Mullah Omar as its leader, the United Front reiterated that an interim Government, which would include third parties, should be established. We understand that the Organization of the Islamic Conference, chaired by the Islamic Republic of Iran, is attempting soon to arrange further talks between the two sides, which would also be held in Jeddah. The United Nations supports fully this effort and will take part in those talks when and if they take place.

Initiatives of non-belligerent Afghan individuals and groups appear to have made some progress. A 30-member executive council of the Rome process, initiated by former King Zahir Shah, convened in Rome on 11 and 12 March with a view to preparing for an emergency *loya jirga*, or a traditional Grand Assembly meeting, inside Afghanistan. These preparations are continuing.

The "six plus two" group of member States that have been concerned with the achievement of peace in Afghanistan has also been active in the recent period, having convened a high-level meeting at Headquarters at the end of February. The meeting addressed the unprecedented increase in the production of narcotic drugs in Afghanistan, an extremely worrisome development. The Secretary-General therefore welcomes the initiative of the "six plus two" group to address this issue. He is pleased that this initiative has led to the preparation of a technical meeting, which will be convened from 8 to 10 May in Vienna and will involve all members of the "six plus two" and the major donor countries.

There were a few other noteworthy developments in and around Afghanistan. There was a process of rapprochement between Commander Ahmed Shah Massoud and his Uzbek rivals, Generals Dostum and Abdul Malik, who were ousted from Afghanistan by the Taliban in 1997 and 1998, respectively.

On 26 March, Ismail Khan, the former Governor of Herat and one of the most important prisoners of the Taliban movement since 1997, escaped from a jail in Kandahar, apparently with the help and connivance of a Taliban guard. The Taliban launched an extensive manhunt in south-western Afghanistan, putting a bounty on his head and threatening to punish with a death sentence those who would help the fugitives. There are contradictory stories and reports about Ismail Khan's present whereabouts.

In concluding this brief review of political developments, I can only note that it is not possible to be optimistic about an early cease-fire between the warring factions, let alone negotiations leading to the formation of a broad-based Government, as repeatedly demanded by the Security Council.

Now I should like to turn to the military situation, which, I fear, is equally gloomy. A stalemate has persisted on the battlefield throughout the winter period,

with the front lines remaining essentially unchanged. As in the past, severe winter weather and the observance of the holy month of Ramadan forced the two sides to reduce the intensity of the fighting. However, this did not mean that it came to a complete halt. The United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA) was informed of continuous clashes in various places, particularly after mid-January.

The intensity and frequency of the clashes between the two sides are steadily on the rise. There is every indication that preparations for organized, large-scale offensives are now well under way on both sides. Reports are abundant regarding active recruitment of fighters, arrivals of reinforcements and continuous supply of war-making *materiél* from outside. Once again, the Afghan warring factions seem ready to repeat the vicious annual cycle of violence with the arrival of spring. I should therefore like to draw the Council's attention to the possible start of a major spring offensive in the near future.

UNSMA believes that the Taliban remain determined to pursue a military solution and to defeat the United Front in the North. It appears that the Taliban and the United Front have already started tactical moves in order to capture terrain of operational importance in the northern provinces of Samangan and Baghlan. UNSMA has received reports in recent days about increased movements of Taliban fighters and equipment in and around Kabul. It seems that the Taliban are once again concentrating their forces at the front lines in the Shomali Plains, which lie only about 40 kilometres to the north of Kabul. Indeed, today there are reports of heavy clashes between the two sides north-east of Kabul.

The United Front might try to launch its own offensive in order to regain lost ground and tilt the military balance in its favour. The reported rapprochement between Commander Massoud and General Dostum may encourage the United Front to heighten the level of its military operations. However, the potential effectiveness of a new Massoud-Dostum coalition remains to be seen. Moreover, the reported escape of Ismail Khan, a close ally of Commander Massoud, could have an impact on this situation.

It should be recalled that the Secretary-General has repeatedly noted in his reports to the General Assembly and the Security Council that external interference is one of the biggest impediments to peace, as it provides the essential means for the continuous civil war in Afghanistan.

The reported involvement of non-Afghan fighters in the conflict, mainly on the side of the Taliban, remains of great concern. Such reports, including from the local media, indicate that in some cases non-Afghan fighters are openly recruited through religious schools in Pakistan and sent into Afghanistan by a convoy of buses and trucks. These foreign volunteers are trained and armed in Afghanistan before being dispatched to the front lines. Observers estimate that, during the past weeks, as many as several thousand additional fighters have arrived in Afghanistan. The involvement of Arabs and Central Asians has been reported as well. The growing reliance on foreign fighters by the warring factions appears to reflect increasing difficulties they face in recruiting soldiers locally.

I should now like to turn to the humanitarian aspects of the situation in Afghanistan. The country continues to suffer from the accumulated effects of war and economic collapse, with basic services virtually non-existent. Conditions in urban areas are particularly miserable. Unemployment in Kabul has reached dramatic proportions, with approximately one quarter of all families surviving on United Nations-subsidized bread and many others on remittances from abroad.

The plight of civilians displaced by conflict constitutes a major problem for the international community. Limited food assistance is provided to internally displaced persons in Kabul and additional food-for-work projects are being developed. Efforts by the United Nations to provide cross-line assistance to the Panjshir Valley were relatively successful at the end of 1999, but have since stalled. The Office of the United Nations Coordinator is continuing to negotiate access with both sides, but conditionalities imposed by the Taliban and rumours of impending offensives seem to have hardened positions. This leaves over 7,000 families of internally displaced persons in the Panjshir Valley in a most precarious situation.

The situation in areas of low-intensity fighting is also quite serious. Displacement, food shortages and a measles epidemic have resulted in close to 1,000 deaths in northern Hazarajat. Atrocities against civilians have compounded the levels of human suffering.

In addition to all of these problems, southern Afghanistan is experiencing at the present time drought conditions which could result in a serious lack of drinking water in urban areas and increased outbreaks of disease.

The United Nations is also most worried by the situation in Kandahar, where searches of United Nations premises and intimidation of staff in recent days caused the withdrawal of all international staff from the area. It is hoped that the Taliban will soon provide the United Nations Coordinator with reliable guarantees against the repetition of such incidents, which are a precondition for the return of international staff. This matter is all the more pressing as Kandahar serves as the centre for assistance in combating the effects of the drought in southern Afghanistan.

As regards refugees, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has facilitated the voluntary return of over 3,000 Afghans from Pakistan since the beginning of this year. In February, the Islamic Republic of Iran and UNHCR agreed on a joint programme for the repatriation of Afghan refugees from Iran. The programme is expected to curb forcible returns by facilitating the voluntary departure of some 3,000 Afghans per week and increasing the level of international protection for those unable or unwilling to return.

I now turn to the area of human rights. The human rights situation in Afghanistan, especially with the onset of another fighting season, must continue to receive the priority attention of the international community. Twenty years of conflict have taken a terrible toll on the Afghan population, killing countless civilians directly while curtailing many other lives through dire poverty and underdevelopment. Indeed, the living conditions of Afghans are so precarious that diarrhoea, an easily treatable disease, is thought to be responsible for the deaths of an estimated 85,000 children each year. Similarly, a recent epidemic of measles, another preventable disease, took the lives of 650 children.

With another season of fighting about to begin, there is every reason to fear that the pattern of targeting civilians will continue. Gross violations of human rights and humanitarian law, including summary executions, arbitrary detention and forced displacement of civilians, have occurred in a systematic manner and sow the seeds for further bouts of fighting.

Recent killings include the alleged execution of elders in Gosfandi, as they tried to mediate the conflict in the Sang Charak area. This type of experience does not augur well for the future and points to the absolute importance of concerted efforts to bring the war to an end and to allow Afghans to fulfil their desire for peace, a peace that is also a prerequisite for the enjoyment of human rights.

I would now like to address the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan. In recent years, especially since the military advances of the Taliban movement, the international community has been intensely engaged with the situation of women and girls in that country, particularly in those areas under the control of the Taliban. The abhorrent measures imposed by the Taliban on the women and girls of Afghanistan have been repeatedly deplored by the Secretary-General and have been condemned in numerous resolutions of this Council, the General Assembly, the Commission on Human Rights and the Commission on the Status of Women.

Cultural norms and traditions in Afghanistan have historically been conservative and characterized by a strong division of gender roles. Political, economic and social decisions tend to be monopolized by males. Increased access of women to education, health services and employment was part of State modernization projects at the beginning of the twentieth century and continued until the late 1970s. This led to a growth in social demand for female education and created a female professional elite, especially in the capital city of Kabul. Nevertheless, the extreme economic poverty of the country and the urban-biased development policies kept most of the rural population, especially women, on the periphery as concerns modernization.

Women's access to education, health, employment and public life has been extremely negatively affected following the Taliban military victories. Where gender issues are concerned, the Taliban ideology amounted to a series of edicts banning women from all public activities. The pre-existing vulnerable situation of girls and women — the result of continuous war, conservative cultural norms, the destruction of social and institutional infrastructures and the absence of policies for the rehabilitation of the social and productive sectors — was significantly aggravated by these Taliban edicts, especially the ban on all types of formal education for girls.

Evidence from the field appears to indicate that in the last 18 months there has been a slow shift in the Taliban's position on the access of women to health services, education and employment opportunities. This shift is, for the most part, due to increased demand from local communities for health and education for girls and for income-generating opportunities for women, especially for war widows heading households. The assistance community has also been instrumental in preparing the ground for this shift through continued

advocacy, principled engagement and constructive dialogue and negotiation with the authorities.

It should also be noted that the restrictions once imposed on female staff of United Nations agencies have been eased in practice. United Nations female staff now travel and work in Afghanistan without major difficulty.

Some relaxation of Taliban policy on women's employment in the health sector dates back to 1997, when women doctors, nurses and midwives were allowed to continue their medical practice in hospitals. More recently, in 1999, about 40 female medical students who were forced to leave Kabul University before receiving their degrees were allowed to continue their education. In the first quarter of this year, the authorities in Kandahar agreed, after lengthy negotiation with the World Food Programme and the World Health Organization, to start a nursing school in Kandahar for 50 female and 50 male nurses.

Progress in the supply of alternatives to formal education in Taliban-ruled areas has been achieved through patient and persistent negotiation and advocacy between local communities, the assistance community and the Taliban authorities. Community-based schools for girls and boys are being established in rural areas, while privately organized home-based girls' education is on the increase in urban areas. The BBC is developing an education programme through radio as an innovative attempt to increase access to education in the country.

Among the most recent developments of note was the establishment in November 1999 of nine community girls' schools that are financed by local communities in agreement with the authorities in Kandahar province and 13 such girls' schools in Kabul.

Currently Afghanistan has no formal economic sectors. In practice, agriculture and small home-based crafts provide the only opportunities for women's employment. Female employment opportunities are limited to carpet weaving, tailoring, embroidery, soap making and similar types of activities. The assistance community has been involved in projects creating this type of employment, and some of their projects have had an impact on the lives of grass-roots women and their families in terms of providing them with subsistence income.

Women have no access to markets, due to their confinement, which leads in many cases to their exploitation by male middlemen, except in cases where non-governmental organizations take the responsibility of the final marketing of their production.

Despite the different policy position adopted by the Taliban and the United Front regarding the role of women, women in the areas controlled by the United Front also suffer from limited access to education, health services and income-generating employment. The region controlled by the United Front has been historically the poorest of Afghanistan. Continued civil war and cultural norms further aggravate the situation of women in that area. However, there would be more windows of opportunity for girls' education in this region if the resources could be made available.

While noting the limited progress that has been recorded recently in improving the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan, the overall situation remains unacceptable and requires the continuous and sustained attention of the international community. Ms. Angela King, Assistant Secretary-General, Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, will be pleased to respond to any comments or questions regarding the situation of women and girls.

The President: I wish to thank Mr. Renninger for his comprehensive briefing and for the somewhat disturbing analysis.

Mr. Listre (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I would like to thank the President for giving me this opportunity to inform the Security Council about some of the activities we have undertaken since 17 January in the sanctions Committee established by resolution 1267 (1999) relating to the situation in Afghanistan.

The fact that we have been able to make significant progress is due, among other things, to very effective coordination with the Secretariat and to excellent readiness on the part of the members of the Committee. I must take this opportunity to acknowledge once again the Secretary of the Committee, Mr. Aleksandar Martinovic.

It is in this spirit that we adopted the Committee's guidelines, which provide the necessary basis for the achievement of the work of the Committee. We have also sent a letter to Member States, in accordance with paragraphs 6 (a) and 10 of resolution 1267 (1999), requesting more information on the measures they have adopted pursuant to paragraphs 4 (a) and (b). In response to that letter, in little more than two months we have

received over 50 written communications from various Member States. Pursuant to paragraph 10 of the resolution, on 4 April the Committee adopted its first report on this issue, which I submitted to the President of the Security Council on the same date. That report, which was circulated under the symbol S/2000/282, will be updated as more communications are received from Member States.

I wish to point out that the Committee has received information from a number of Member States that they are awaiting the designations referred to in paragraphs 4 (b) and 6 (e) in order to report on the full implementation of paragraph 4 of the resolution. I will refer to the issue of designation, which is presently before the Committee, at a later stage.

Continuing on the subject of the work undertaken by the Committee, thanks to information provided by Member States the Committee has updated the list of aircraft referred to in paragraph 4 (a) of resolution 1267 (1999), which was adopted at the end of last year under the interim chairmanship of the United Kingdom. The Committee authorized one humanitarian flight, at the request of a German non-governmental organization, to transport sick children from Afghanistan for treatment in Germany. In that endeavour we had the assistance of both of the States on whose territories the aircraft was to make stopovers, as well as of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which have jointly monitored these flights along with national authorities and which later reported to the Committee as to compliance.

We have authorized 360 flight segments from the cities of Kabul and Kandahar in Afghanistan to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia — with stopovers in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates — so that 12,000 Afghan pilgrims could comply with their religious obligation of the haj. In accordance with the Committee's guidelines, the flights were monitored by national authorities and by the United Nations Development Programme, both in Sharjah and in Jeddah. As in the case of previous flights, those authorities have briefed the Committee.

Last week, after some technical delays, return flights began to transport the 12,000 pilgrims back to Afghanistan. It is hoped that the return flights will be concluded by the date set, namely, 23 April. I am truly pleased that despite a number of impediments, these flights took place successfully.

As I expected, the organization of these flights on several occasions required the attention of the Committee on related matters. Those included changes in flight timetables, technical monitoring and servicing of the aircraft, the use of one of those flights to transport essential materials for an aviation security project of the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the repair of four turbine engines in Jordan, and even the hiring of additional aircraft from Air Gulf Falcon due to the unavailability of one of the authorized planes.

All of this required active participation on the part of members of the Committee, United Nations staff, UNDP, national authorities and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). I would also like to point out that with regard to the haj, significant cooperation was provided by the Taliban authorities, who to date have provided the Committee with all the information required of it.

Thanks to contributions from the authorities in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, UNDP required only $20,000 for the whole extensive operation of the monitoring of the haj flights in Sharjah and Jeddah. Faced with the requirement to monitor those flights, we had found that there were not sufficient resources within the Secretariat for such activities. Finally, the members of the Committee agreed to use funds earmarked for the travel of the Chairmen of the sanctions Committee for this purpose, on the understanding that an effort would be made to recuperate those funds. On the basis of this experience, I would like to recall the importance of either establishing as soon as possible a flexible mechanism that will enable us to solve these kinds of problems, or directly earmarking resources to enable committees such as mine to move quickly in these cases.

The Committee also authorized the return from Stansted in the United Kingdom of an Ariana Airlines flight that had been hijacked in Afghanistan.

The Committee met with representatives of ICAO and IATA in order to comply with paragraph 6 (f) of the resolution, on granting an exemption under paragraph 4 (b) to the IATA regarding payments to be made to the aeronautical authority of Afghanistan on behalf of international airlines for air traffic control services. The exchange that took place with the representatives of those two institutions was significant. The Committee now expects the presentation of a report this month from ICAO and IATA in order to take action on this matter.

As I said earlier, the Committee is now dealing with paragraph 4 (b), which refers to the freezing of Taliban

funds and other financial resources under its direct or indirect control. The wording of that paragraph, as well as that of paragraph 6 (e), requires the Committee to designate these funds and resources in a similar way as was done with aircraft under paragraph 4 (a).

To that end, the Committee has used as a basis a series of definitions from the second Interlaken seminar on targeted financial sanctions, which was held last March under the auspices of the Swiss Government. We are close to agreement on a text that will contain the designations that we feel would help those States that have not yet done so to comply with paragraph 4 (b) of the resolution. We would hope that once the Committee formally concludes this stage on the subject of designations the Secretariat will — on that basis and pursuant to paragraph 12 of resolution 1267 (1999) — submit a report containing a series of proposals to improve monitoring of compliance with measures provided for in paragraph 4 (b). We understand that this report is not yet available, as it is subject to the designation referred to in paragraphs 4 (b) and 6 (e), which the Committee is now concluding.

Finally, I wish to point out that the effectiveness and, to some extent, the success of any sanctions regime depend on the level of implementation and compliance with its measures. This is particularly true of targeted sanctions regimes, as is the case with this resolution. As a result, I appeal to all Member States to implement fully resolution 1267 (1999).

I should now like to make a statement in my capacity as Permanent Representative of Argentina.

First of all, I wish to express the satisfaction of the delegation of Argentina at seeing you, Sir, preside over this meeting of the Security Council. Your presence in this Chamber is further proof of the commitment of Canada, a great country of our North American continent, to the United Nations, which has been made clear by the valuable and generous support it has provided to this Organization.

Allow me, Mr. President, to join in the condolences that you expressed on the passing of President Bourguiba, and we extend our most sincere condolences to the delegation of Tunisia.

The delegation of Argentina would like to express its gratitude for the updated information provided by the Secretariat through the report introduced by Mr. Renninger. The situation in Afghanistan is very complex and dramatic, and we feel that it is appropriate to deal with it in the format of an open briefing.

The delegation of Argentina is concerned that the parties to the conflict are preparing to launch new offensives, which would have a negative impact on the already suffering civilian population. It is intolerable that these people should continue to be the victims of violations of human rights and of the most fundamental norms of humanitarian law. In the context of an ongoing rejection of arbitrary detentions, summary executions and forced labour of detainees, we support the deployment of the Civil Affairs Unit of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan when security conditions allow, which does not seem likely any time soon.

The delegation of Argentina therefore condemns the intimidation tactics used by the armed forces of the Taliban against United Nations staff in Kandahar. We appeal to all parties to the conflict to respect international norms relating to the safety of United Nations personnel, related staff and humanitarian staff.

We find the food security situation particularly alarming. It may deteriorate further as a result of the severe drought that is gripping southern Afghanistan. We are alarmed also by the information contained in the most recent report of the Secretary-General regarding the problem of educating girls, the precarious health conditions for the population in general and for children in particular, and the difficult situation of female-headed households. For this reason we are pleased on this occasion to note the presence of Ms. Angela King, the Special Adviser on Gender Issues.

The problem of the manufacturing, stockpiling and trafficking of narcotic drugs is of great concern, and we once again express our condemnation of it. We feel that this scourge fuels the conflict, and we therefore appeal to the parties to show their determination to put an end to it.

We regret that the failure to comply with resolution 1267 (1999) has forced members of the Security Council to continue to implement the measures contained in operative paragraph 4 of that resolution.

For that reason, we urge once again all of the Afghan parties to intensify their efforts to resume diplomatic negotiations and to reject a military solution. We also call urgently on neighbouring countries to stop providing military resources to the warring parties.

Finally, Argentina wishes to express its gratitude for the efforts made by the Secretary-General's Personal Representative, Mr. Francesc Vendrell, and for those being carried out within the framework of the "six plus two" group, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Rome process.

The President: I thank the representative of Argentina for the kind words he addressed to Canada.

Mr. Lavrov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I should like at the outset to join in conveying condolences to the delegation of Tunisia in connection with the death of President Bourguiba. We would like also to join in thanking Ambassador Chowdhury and the entire delegation of Bangladesh for the work they did in March. In addition, we are pleased to see you, Mr. Minister, preside over the Security Council today.

We have listened with great interest to the briefing provided by Mr. Renninger. We believe that it will help us in our consideration of the matter before us today. We are also grateful to Ambassador Listre for the information on the useful work being done by the Committee he chairs.

The Security Council's consideration today of the situation in Afghanistan is very timely indeed. The Taliban is to blame for the situation in the country in all respects, which is extremely unfortunate and disturbing. The Taliban continues to flagrantly violate resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly and apparently has no intention of abandoning its illegal and destructive policies. The Council must react to such developments.

We strongly condemn the continuing escalation by the Taliban of the fighting there, which is postponing still further any hopes for a peaceful settlement of the situation in Afghanistan and which is bringing even greater suffering to the people of that country. We are outraged by the continuing policy of attacks by the Taliban on United Nations personnel, as happened recently in Kandahar.

The Taliban's belief that it can resolve the Afghan problem by force and its claim to ethnic and religious domination of the country are indeed doomed to failure. Only a political settlement, though direct talks between the parties under the auspices of the United Nations, taking account of the interests of all groups and sectors of Afghan society, can put an end to this conflict. It is only by establishing, on the basis of such talks, a broad-based and multi-ethnic government that we can ensure the rights of all Afghan people and that their country can move ahead towards peace, national concord and prosperity.

The Security Council must issue a strong warning to the Taliban about the need to halt preparations for the resumption of a large-scale offensive and to begin serious peace talks. The Government of the Islamic State of Afghanistan has more than once expressed its readiness for such talks.

We are seriously disturbed at the increase in outside interference in internal Afghan affairs, particularly by the direct involvement in fighting on the Taliban side of thousands of foreign fighters and mercenaries. We appeal to all neighbours of Afghanistan immediately to take measures to prevent their territories from being used to provide military support to the Afghan parties.

There is growing support by the Taliban for international terrorism and extremism. Russia itself has faced large-scale manifestations of this within its own territory. This kind of problem has arisen for a number of our partners in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and together with them we are taking coordinated action, *inter alia* through establishing a single anti-terrorist centre in the CIS.

Against this backdrop we are particularly disturbed by the Taliban's refusal to comply with the Security Council's demand that it turn over the international terrorist Usama bin Laden, by its open collusion with extremist and terrorist elements operating in territories of other States, and by the training in Taliban-controlled territory of mercenaries to carry out terrorist activities in neighbouring and other countries. Such actions by the leadership of the Taliban represent a blatant challenge to the entire international community and flagrant interference in the internal affairs of other States.

This in itself offers serious grounds for raising the question of tightening the targeted sanctions imposed earlier by the Security Council against the Taliban.

The Security Council must also do more to ensure that the Taliban implement the other demands contained in the Council's resolutions. We are seriously disturbed about the growing drug threat from Afghanistan. According to estimates, up to 40 per cent of the heroin that enters Europe and North America comes from Afghanistan. Incidentally, there are reports that Kosovo is the main channel for drugs moving from Afghanistan into Europe. Drugs from Afghanistan are also moving to

other regions of the world, including central Asia and Russia. In the framework of the "six plus two" group, Russia has actively supported the initiative to coordinate efforts by neighbouring States of Afghanistan to counter this drug threat.

We are grateful to the United Nations International Drug Control Programme for taking practical steps to strengthen the so-called security zone around Afghanistan. We are expecting an increase in assistance to Russian border units that are protecting the Tajik-Afghan border and trying to staunch the flow of drugs across that border. The international community must speak out about the Taliban's continuing disregard of demands for a halt to violations of international humanitarian law and of human rights, including discriminatory policies against women and girls.

The United Nations must continue to play a key role in resolving the situation in Afghanistan. The Security Council must remain constantly aware of the issue of Afghanistan and take necessary measures to help the situation in the country evolve.

We support the work of the new Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, Francesc Vendrell, and of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan. We welcome the resumption of the work of the "six plus two" group, which is the main international mechanism helping the United Nations in its efforts to find a peaceful settlement to the conflict in Afghanistan. The Organization of the Islamic Conference is doing useful work in coordinating United Nations activities.

We expect the adoption of the agreed draft presidential statement in the Security Council to help ensure better and greater coordination with the international community on all aspects of the Afghanistan problem, in the interests of finding a swift political settlement to the situation there.

The President: I thank the representative of the Russian Federation for the kind words he addressed to me.

Mr. Levitte (France) (*spoke in French*): I should like to join you, Mr. President, in paying tribute to former President Bourguiba of Tunisia. By attending the funeral tomorrow, President Chirac will express the sentiments and solidarity of all of the people of France, who are united with the people of Tunisia in their grief.

I, too, should like to congratulate Ambassador Chowdhury, and I should like to welcome you, Mr. President, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Canada, to our Council.

I am grateful to Ambassador Listre for the information that he has given us, and I should also like to thank the Secretariat for providing us with a detailed and comprehensive briefing. The situation in Afghanistan is still extremely disturbing, whether with regard to the continuation of fighting, interference with the work of humanitarian organizations, violations of human rights — in particular, the situation of women — support for international terrorism or the increase in the production of and trafficking in drugs.

In all these areas, the Security Council has already taken a firm position. It will do so again after this meeting through a statement by the President. France fully supports the draft presidential statement to be issued. Indeed, it is important to make clear that that statement reflects the unanimity of the membership of the Council.

Unanimously, we recall the principles for a political settlement in Afghanistan and, in particular, the objective of attaining a fully representative government, acceptable to all. Such a consensus among members of the Council must be highlighted. We hope that the particularly strong message being sent to the Afghan parties, in particular the Taliban, will be heard and acted upon.

I should like to make two specific comments. First, with regard to the military situation, hostilities have resumed, and members of the Council have already expressed concern about the offensive launched by the Taliban at the beginning of March. My delegation is particularly worried about the involvement of foreign elements in the fighting that is taking place. The Secretariat has just stressed the fact that several thousand foreigners are involved in the military operations, most of them fighting on the side of the Taliban. My delegation therefore fully supports the appeal by the Security Council for a halt to such outside interference.

My second comment relates to the political prospects. France fully supports the current efforts being made by the new Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Vendrell, aimed at achieving a political settlement. I am referring to his participation in recent meetings organized by the Organization of the Islamic Conference in Jeddah. Here, I should like to

emphasize that the Rome process, which was launched at the end of last year with a view to convening a *loya jirgah*, or grand assembly, is very important. We believe that this peace initiative, coming from Afghan civil society, deserves special attention. The advocates of this initiative have decided to send delegations to the belligerent parties to encourage them to join in that effort at reconciliation. We believe that it would be useful for the Secretariat to consider ways of getting all the Afghan parties to support that initiative.

Mr. Holbrooke (United States of America): I am particularly honoured to be here today, under your presidency, Sir, at this important meeting, and I am delighted that you intend to spend so much of the month of Canada's presidency of the Security Council with us here in New York. We greatly look forward to working under your leadership. I also want to express my very high regard for Ambassador Fowler and the entire Canadian delegation for presiding over this "month of human security" and, in particular, for their immense efforts with regard to the Angola sanctions issue, which I know we will be discussing later in the month, and to which we in our Government are also devoting so much attention in support of their efforts.

I would also like to thank John Renninger of the Department for Political Affairs and the Special Adviser on Gender Issues, Angela King, for drawing our attention to the plight of women and girls in Afghanistan, particularly in the 1997 report of the United Nations Inter-Agency Gender Mission to Afghanistan. I would also like to thank my friend Ambassador Arnoldo Listre for his superb work as Chairman of the Security Council's Taliban sanctions Committee and for his report today, and to thank Ambassador Chowdhury again for his presidency of the Security Council last month.

I would like also to join other members in expressing our special sympathy to the people of Tunisia in connection with the passing of President Bourguiba. He was an immense figure in the world. I remember very clearly, as early as the early 1960s, his enormous impact on public thinking in the United States. He was one of the very first leaders of both Africa and the Arab world to bring to the attention of the American people, and of the world, the emerging desires of the peoples of Africa and of the Maghreb — an area for which I have special affection — for justice, democracy and human rights. We will always remember him for his courageous stands in support of tolerance and understanding within the Arab world and between the Arabs and the rest of the world, and on behalf of North Africa, and all of Africa. I shall be at the Tunisian embassy at the earliest possible moment to join my colleagues in signing the condolence book.

Afghanistan is obviously one of the great horror stories of the world today. It is a vexing and tragic mosaic of suffering, and its seemingly endless civil war exacerbates an already dire humanitarian situation, as we heard in the briefing this morning. It is draining resources that could be used to alleviate privation, and it is preventing the people of Afghanistan from reaching their full potential. Also, the conditions of lawlessness and disorder that now exist allow terrorism and the trade in illegal narcotics to flourish.

The promotion of human rights, particularly the rights of women and girls, is among our highest priorities today. In his recent millennium report (A/54/2000), the Secretary-General reminded us that protecting the well-being of women and children, particularly in areas of conflict, will be one of the greatest challenges facing the United Nations in this century. As Hillary Rodham Clinton, one of my own country's greatest leaders in the effort to protect the rights of women and girls around the globe and to empower them, said last December at the White House, abuses of fundamental freedoms "are not customs. They are not religious practices. They are human rights violations".

The United States continues to press all Afghan factions, especially the Taliban and their supporters, to protect and nurture the basic freedoms of all Afghans, particularly women and girls. When we talk to the Taliban — and we do — we stress our continued desire to see improvement in this area.

Our human rights report, issued last month, paints a regrettably grim picture. In addition to the treatment of women and girls, there are unacceptable abuses of civilians in general. The human development index of the United Nations Development Programme ranks Afghanistan among the world's lowest, while the gender disparity index, based on female life expectancy, education and income, ranks Afghanistan dead last.

But due to the efforts of the United Nations and the community of non-governmental organizations, the situation is not hopeless. There are signs of modest improvement, at least in informal opportunities for girls, even if our best information suggests that this remains spotty and fragile. Somewhat more encouraging is a trend

towards improved access to medical treatment for women and girls, at least in Kabul.

Regrettably, the Taliban's official policies remain unchanged. It is therefore primarily the United Nations and the international community of non-governmental organizations that can claim credit for what little progress has been made. This brings to mind the words and the work of Eleanor Roosevelt, one of the first leaders of the United Nations who, as chairwoman of the Human Rights Commission, helped draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. She reminded us that it is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.

In noting the work of the United Nations, I would like to ask Ms. King, the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, about the restrictions on the public role of women in Afghanistan. What can we do to encourage the Afghan regime to allow women to vote, to seek employment, to organize themselves and to work for better treatment, in order to gain their appropriate place in civil society?

Last year, United States humanitarian aid to the Afghan people totaled over $70 million, making the United States the world's single largest aid provider to Afghanistan. Over half the United States contribution, $44 million, was in the form of wheat or flour distributed through the United Nations and the World Food Programme. Of the cash component, more than $3 million was for educational and other programmes specifically targeted to help women and girls, mainly refugees in Pakistan. This year's effort will be of comparable magnitude.

We have expanded United States support for the resettlement programme for persecuted Afghans. These cases are referred by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and administered by the United States Department of State. We expect to welcome about 1,500 Afghan women and their families this year. Nearly 300 were resettled here under this programme last year. We call on other nations to step forward to accept a share of the responsibility to provide refuge to Afghans, joining Pakistan, which hosts by far the largest number on its territory, and Iran, another major country of refuge.

We are committed to supporting these efforts, and we insist that all Afghan factions, particularly the Taliban, support them as well. We want more than tacit, grudging acceptance of reforms. Humanitarian operations in Afghanistan must be allowed to proceed unhindered. Afghan parties have an obligation to protect humanitarian and other international personnel. Violations of this obligation, such as the searches of United Nations offices in Kandahar by Taliban militia on 26, 27 and 29 March, are simply unacceptable. The responsibility for the subsequent withdrawal of United Nations international staff from Kandahar and the suspension of humanitarian assistance activities in southern Afghanistan rests solely with the Taliban.

Terrorism, narcotics and Afghanistan's continuing civil war also demand attention. The efforts of the international community to persuade the Taliban to stop supporting international terrorism complement, rather than conflict with, our humanitarian interest in Afghanistan. We must remember that United Nations sanctions as set out in resolution 1267 (1999) were carefully crafted to target only the Taliban, not the innocent people and certainly not the women and girls of Afghanistan. The Taliban must comply with the demand of resolution 1267 (1999) that Usama bin Laden be turned over to authorities in a country where he will be brought to justice. So long as Usama bin Laden enjoys safe haven in Afghanistan, the international community is at risk, as illustrated by the recently disrupted terrorist plot in Jordan. I would like to highlight the obligation of all Member States under resolution 1267 (1999) to implement sanctions on Taliban assets and flights effectively and promptly.

Narcotics is also a serious concern. Last year, Afghanistan became the world's largest producer of opium. This is almost entirely consumed outside Afghanistan's borders, making the threat from illicit narcotics an international issue of serious magnitude. We have noted recent reports that the Taliban have eradicated some poppy in Afghanistan and hope this means that such efforts will be undertaken on a larger scale. We encourage the efforts of the "six plus two" group of Afghanistan's neighbours plus Russia and the United States in working towards solutions to these problems. We also need donor cooperation and support. And we look forward to the upcoming Vienna meeting of the United Nations International Drug Control Programme.

The United States continues to believe that the Afghanistan tragedy can be settled only through negotiations aimed at finding a solution accommodating the rights and interests of all Afghans. In this regard, we welcome the work of the Secretary-General and his Personal Representative. We appreciate the recent efforts

to promote peace, including the Rome process and the Cyprus group. But more must be done.

In conclusion, let me say that the United States remains committed to helping forge solutions to the many pressing problems of Afghanistan. We must work together to alleviate the suffering of innocents, particularly those, like women and girls, who are disproportionately harmed. Let us pledge to continue and strengthen our efforts to achieve positive results in these endeavours.

I thank you, Mr. President, for your presence at this important meeting today.

The President: I thank the representative of the United States for the kind words he addressed to Canada and to its delegation.

Mr. Ahmed (Bangladesh): The Bangladesh delegation wishes to join others in expressing our sincere condolences to the delegation of Tunisia on the sad demise of former President Habib Bourguiba.

Let me also begin by joining previous speakers in commending the Canadian presidency of the Council for convening this open briefing on Afghanistan. Our sincere thanks go to you, Sir, for your very warm words and to previous speakers for the warm sentiments they expressed towards Ambassador Chowdhury and his team and for Bangladesh's presidency of the Council last month.

We also appreciate the briefing provided by the Secretariat for a second time, further to the 10 March report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan. We should also like to pay our compliments to Ambassador Listre for his excellent presentation on the work of the sanctions Committee established pursuant to Security Council resolution 1267 (1999).

Bangladesh believes that there is no alternative to a comprehensive political settlement of the existing situation in Afghanistan and that will mean the formation of a broad-based, multi-ethnic and representative Government. It is regrettable, however, that not much progress has so far been achieved as regards narrowing the differences among the parties on the establishment of such a Government. We commend the continued efforts of Mr. Francesc Vendrell, the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General on Afghanistan, to bring the warring parties to the path of negotiation and to maintain consultations with the Governments in the region, including the "six plus two" group.

The threat of resumption of a large-scale military offensive in Afghanistan, as confirmed by the assessment of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA), remains a matter of serious concern. The Council strongly deplored the outbreak of fighting last month between the forces of the Taliban and the United Front in the northern Kunduz province and north of Kabul around the Bagram air base. The Secretary-General in his report has mentioned that the flow of weapons and war-making materials into Afghanistan has continued throughout the winter, enabling both sides to prepare for fresh spring offensives. The foremost need, therefore, is to concentrate all efforts to persuade the parties to enter into a process of dialogue that may lead to a verifiable cease-fire and eventually to an agreement on the establishment of a broad-based, multi-ethnic and fully representative Government. Such an endeavour can be effectively complemented by the immediate and complete cessation of the flow of arms and military supplies to the warring parties in Afghanistan from outside.

We are deeply disturbed that the United Nations had to withdraw its international staff from the Kandahar office following repeated incursions onto United Nations premises by the Taliban security forces, in violation of formal agreements between the parties. We join others in expressing in clear and categorical terms our disapproval of such violations of the safety and immunity of the United Nations and its personnel. We demand that conditions be created to enable the return of the international staff of the United Nations office in Kandahar.

The humanitarian consequences of the long, drawn-out war in Afghanistan need no elaboration. We are seriously concerned at the disastrous socio-economic conditions in Afghanistan severely affecting its people, due to and exacerbated by unending fighting. Civilians are targeted deliberately, their assets destroyed, their homes subjected to widespread burning and looting. Women and children have become particularly vulnerable in such worsening socio-economic conditions. There has been little progress in the education sector in general and for girls in particular.

The health conditions for many Afghans remain extremely precarious, with reports of significant increases in acute respiratory infectious diseases causing at least 25 per cent of child mortality in the war-ravaged country. There are disturbing reports of a wide range of human

rights violations, such as summary executions, arbitrary detention and forced labour for detainees.

The magnitude of the humanitarian problem is overwhelming when we consider the more than 2.5 million displaced Afghans who still remain in Pakistan and Iran. We hope the repatriation process that started towards the end of last month will continue, with the refugees returning voluntarily, in safety and with dignity. We will also hope that the returning refugees will receive the necessary international assistance.

The United Nations has and should continue to play a central role in the international efforts to achieve a lasting settlement of the Afghan crisis. We hope that this important role will be further strengthened and complemented by the other ongoing initiatives on the Afghan question. The United Nations agencies are doing a commendable job in reaching the affected Afghan people. The Secretary-General has reported the severe food security situation in Kabul, the central highlands, Badakhshan, Ghowr and Kandahar. We hope that relevant agencies, such as the World Food Programme and others, will intensify their efforts to address this vital need and we call upon all concerned in Afghanistan to provide unimpeded access to these agencies. Similar access should also be ensured to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) when these agencies launch a national immunization drive for children against polio in Afghanistan in early May and early June.

Bangladesh supports the draft presidential statement on Afghanistan which will be adopted by the Council later today.

Mr. Chen Xu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, we wish like other countries to convey our condolences to the Republic of Tunisia on the passing of its former President.

We also wish to congratulate the delegation of Bangladesh for its excellent work last month in the presidency of the Council.

We thank the Secretariat for its briefing and the Ambassador of Argentina for his report on the work of the sanctions Committee.

We are pleased to see the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Canada, Mr. Lloyd Axworthy, presiding over our meeting today.

The Chinese delegation wishes to express its deep regret and disappointment over the continuing conflict in Afghanistan. We believe that the current situation there is very precarious. The Taliban and the United Front are expanding their forces in the North in preparation for war and sporadic fighting continues in some areas. Now that spring is here, if the factions in Afghanistan are unable to resume negotiations soon, that country will very likely be witness to a large-scale military offensive. We therefore thank the Canadian Minister for Foreign Affairs for convening this open briefing today, which was clearly very necessary and timely.

Following decades of war, the people of Afghanistan long for an end to the fighting and instability and for a peaceful life. Military means can never offer a solution to their problems. Only the establishment of a broad-based representative Government can promote peace in Afghanistan.

The Chinese delegation greatly appreciates the diplomatic efforts made by the newly appointed Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Vendrell, since assuming his post and supports the good offices of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan and other actors towards a political settlement of the question of Afghanistan. We believe that the international community should work hard to break the vicious yearly cycle in which the Afghan factions negotiate in winter and fight in the spring. We urge all sides concerned, including the "six plus two" group and especially the neighbouring countries with strong influence over the factions in Afghanistan, to work towards that end. China will actively participate in the peace efforts of the "six plus two" group.

Illicit drug production in and trafficking of drugs from Afghanistan have caused serious damage to many countries. As has happened in other areas, drugs have become a means of maintaining warfare. This problem should be a matter of great concern to the international community. We highly appreciate the efforts made by the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention.

We are deeply disturbed by the deterioration in the humanitarian and human rights situations in Afghanistan. Long-term war has rendered Afghanistan one of the most tragic areas of the world. Most unacceptable is that civilians have become targets of attack. Afghan people, especially women and girls, have experienced exceptionally serious difficulties. We strongly urge all the

factions in Afghanistan to implement their commitments to effectively ensure the security and safety of the United Nations and international assistance personnel so that the international community can provide humanitarian assistance to the abandoned people of Afghanistan.

The President: I thank the representative of China for his kind words addressed to Canada.

Mr. van Walsum (Netherlands): I join you, Mr. President, and other speakers in expressing our condolences to the delegation of Tunisia on the passing away of former President Bourguiba. I also join other speakers in expressing our delight at seeing you, Sir, back in the chair.

I thank Mr. Renninger for his briefing on the situation in Afghanistan and Ambassador Listre for his information on the activities of the sanctions Committee. I further welcome Ms. Angela King, whose expertise in gender issues is clearly indispensable when we are dealing with a country like Afghanistan.

My delegation condemns the latest offensives, and we are gravely concerned at the military build-up and the preparations for further large-scale offensives by the parties.

It remains our conviction that there is no military solution to the conflict in Afghanistan. Trying to settle the dispute by military means prolongs the conflict, carries the risk of further regionalization and increases the suffering of the Afghan people, and it will not contribute to a process of reconciliation in the future. No one can win this war, but all can destroy the country.

The warring parties are responsible for finding a political solution that will end the suffering of the Afghan people. We appeal to them to stop the fighting and return to the negotiating table. It is of the utmost importance that the neighbouring countries strictly adhere to the Tashkent Declaration, in particular to the commitment not to provide military support to any Afghan party and to prevent the use of their territories for such purposes.

The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan remains alarming. The offensive of the Taliban on 1 March this year has led to another stream of displaced persons, and once again women and children were the primary victims. The civilian population is becoming ever more destitute and desperate, and the future of Afghanistan as a country looks bleaker by the day.

For many people in Afghanistan international humanitarian assistance is a lifeline. We are therefore deeply concerned about the forced entries by Taliban armed groups into the United Nations premises in Kandahar, which compelled the United Nations to withdraw its international staff from that city and resulted in the suspension of humanitarian assistance in southern Afghanistan.

The rigid social code imposed by the Taliban results in many restrictions for women and girls, for example with regard to employment, education and health care services. The restrictions most acutely affect educated women in the cities, but their impact is also felt by poor, uneducated women, their children and other family members. Eventually this cannot fail to have a negative influence on the prospects for development in Afghanistan.

There are even more alarming consequences of publicly accepted discrimination against women. My delegation strongly condemns the way in which over the years many Afghan women and girls have become victims of gender-specific human rights violations, such as rape, assault, forced marriage and prostitution. Violence against women and girls sometimes seems to be used as an instrument of intimidation and humiliation of entire population groups.

The exclusion of women from services is not an innocent, culturally determined idiosyncrasy. In a country where on average 10 people are killed or injured by exploding landmines every day, it is, of course, criminal to exclude women from mine-awareness training.

Although we recognize recent signs of modest relaxation of Taliban rules on access of women and girls to certain services, and while we also note that there are regional differences in the interpretation and observance of these rules, the exclusion of girls from education remains of grave concern to my delegation. It should be kept in mind that it is not just the education of girls that is affected by these restrictions, for a very large part of the teaching corps in Afghanistan used to consist of women. Due to employment restrictions on women, education for boys is stagnating as well. Again, this results in a weakening of the prospects for social and economic development.

In other words, Afghanistan is experiencing a humanitarian emergency, and once more women and children are the most vulnerable group. Over the years,

the Netherlands has generously contributed to humanitarian assistance to the country on the understanding that it should be equally accessible to men and women and special attention should be paid to the position of women and girls. But international assistance cannot undo the damage caused by the marginalization of half the population. We therefore appeal to the Taliban to bring their rules on access to employment, education and health care services more into line with those of the international community, including the rest of the Islamic world.

The President: I thank the representative of the Netherlands for his very kind words.

Mr. Andjaba (Namibia): My delegation joins you, Mr. President, and other members of the Security Council in conveying our profound sympathy and heartfelt condolences to the delegation of Tunisia on the passing away of President Bourguiba. His selfless contribution to the struggle for freedom and independence for the peoples of Africa will be remembered by future generations. His death is not only a loss to Tunisia, but to Africa as a whole.

Let me join others in expressing my delegation's appreciation to see you, Mr. President. We welcome you to our meeting this morning.

The magnitude of the suffering of the people of Afghanistan because of the war is comparable to that of situations in Africa. It is therefore important that we continue to seek solutions to achieve peace in Afghanistan.

I also want to thank Mr. Renninger for his very comprehensive briefing this morning.

Our thanks go also to Ambassador Listre for the recent report and for the information about the work of the sanctions Committee. We are of the view that his delegation is doing a commendable job in attending to the work of the Committee.

My delegation welcomes the slowdown in fighting between the two factions in Afghanistan after the recent offensives. We trust that this situation will continue, to allow for uninterrupted humanitarian assistance. However, we are concerned at reports about preparations for renewed fighting by the parties. The report before us is very clear about the devastating effects of the war on civilians — especially women and children — who already have to battle other extreme elements, such as harsh winter conditions.

We are deeply concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the country, and we condemn the violations of human rights perpetrated against civilians. In particular we condemn and reject all discriminatory practices and restrictions against women and girls by the Taliban. We therefore welcome the continuing efforts by the United Nations — and in particular by the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General — to find a lasting political solution to the Afghan conflict.

My delegation remains of the view that only a negotiated political settlement aimed at the establishment of a broad-based, multi-ethnic and fully representative Government acceptable to all Afghans can lead to peace and national reconciliation. In this regard, we welcome the renewed commitment of members of the "six plus two" group to contribute to the peaceful resolution of the Afghan conflict. Furthermore, we welcome the efforts made by other parties — such as the recent peace talks in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, which were arranged by the Organization of the Islamic Conference — as well as other initiatives to promote peace in Afghanistan.

With regard to drug cultivation and production activities in Afghanistan, my delegation is particularly struck by and concerned about the magnitude of the problem and the role it plays in the continuation of the conflict. We therefore welcome the efforts made by the United Nations through the Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, as well as the initiatives by the "six plus two" group, to curtail the cultivation, production and trafficking of drugs in Afghanistan.

Finally, my delegation supports the draft presidential statement that was submitted by the Russian delegation.

The President: I thank the representative of Namibia for his kind words addressed to me.

Mr. Eldon (United Kingdom): I should like to join in the condolences that have been expressed by other members of the Council to the delegation of Tunisia on the death of President Bourguiba, and also in the congratulations that have been expressed to the President, and others around the Council table today. It is a great pleasure to see you here, Mr. President. Your commitment to the United Nations, and to the Security Council in particular, is much appreciated and welcomed by the United Kingdom.

I should also like to thank Ambassador Listre for the cooperation that he has extended to us as Chairman of the Afghan sanctions Committee over the various troubling experiences that we have had to trouble the Committee with over the last few weeks.

I should like straightaway to say how much the United Kingdom deplored the recent forced entry by Taliban armed groups into United Nations premises in Kandahar on 26, 27 and 29 March, and the consequent intimidation of United Nations personnel. The Taliban must recognize that their actions fall well short of internationally accepted norms of behaviour. We call on them to stop such practices and urge them to guarantee the safety of United Nations and other international personnel in Afghanistan. Such actions completely undermine their arguments for recognition by the international community.

It was clear from Personal Representative Vendrell's briefing to the Council on 28 March, and from what Mr. Renninger has said today, that the long-suffering people of Afghanistan are in for another summer of misery. Fighting has already resumed. Both protagonists are preparing for new offensives, but a military victory is not possible. An obvious contribution to improving the humanitarian and human rights situation would be the advent of peace. A ceasefire, followed by a negotiated settlement leading to a broad-based Government, is the best solution. The United Nations has a crucial role in brokering this; hence our dismay at the violation of United Nations immunity in Kandahar and our concern at what Mr. Renninger has said today about external interference. We call again for an end to the outside interference, which lessens considerably the chances of peace in Afghanistan.

We continue to support United Nations efforts to facilitate a solution in Afghanistan, and we urge a redoubling of the efforts by the "six plus two" group.

The United Kingdom is deeply concerned about the human rights situation in Afghanistan, and particularly as it affects women and girls. As Mr. Renninger has said, the litany of discrimination against them is all too familiar: restrictions on access to health care, education and employment outside the home, restrictions on freedom of movement, restrictions on their freedom from intimidation, harassment and violence. The report of the Special Rapporteur on human rights in Afghanistan highlights further, yet more disturbing, violations of the human rights of Afghan women and children last year. We have also noted an emerging trend of deliberate targeting of civilians by the various combatants. This violates any number of international norms. It is simply unacceptable, and it cannot and should not be tolerated.

We urge all factions — in particular the Taliban, who must bear primary responsibility — to end immediately all human rights violations against women and children, to repeal all discriminatory legislation and measures and to ensure the full and equal participation of women and girls in civil society, as well as their full access to health care and education. We have pointed out to the Taliban — and this I think is a particularly telling point — that other Islamic societies accord more rights to women.

We have noted reports of some improvement in the access for women and girls to health care and education. We welcome any positive developments, but these moves are nowhere near enough. Their continues to be a yawning gap between the promises and actions, particularly by the Taliban. We need as a Council to consider how we can close that gap.

The United Kingdom will continue to make these points in our contacts with the factions. We support the United Nations fully in its humanitarian efforts.

In pursuing its own programme of humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people, the United Kingdom actively participates in the principled programming approach under the United Nations-led strategic framework for Afghanistan. This approach is designed to ensure that assistance works towards the eradication of any form of discrimination, including gender discrimination.

As the Council will know, the United Kingdom provides funding for the Islamabad-based United Nations gender adviser post. We would be interested in an assessment of the activities of the Adviser and how they might be developed further.

The President: I thank the representative of the United Kingdom for his very forthright statement and for the kind words he addressed to me.

Mr. Ouane (Mali) (*spoke in French*): The delegation of Mali extends its condolences to the people of Tunisia in connection with the death of President Bourguiba and associates itself fully with the tribute that you, Sir, paid to him at the beginning of this meeting. I would like also to express my delegation's satisfaction at

seeing you preside over this meeting of the Security Council to consider the situation in Afghanistan.

Let me thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive and detailed report. I am grateful also to Ambassador Listre for the report he presented in his capacity as Chairman of the sanctions Committee, and to Mr. Renninger for updating the information provided by the Secretariat.

I should like first of all to express our serious concern over the continuing conflict in Afghanistan, which is bringing such terrible suffering to the civilian population of that country and which poses a serious and growing threat to regional and international peace and security. We condemn the new offensives by the Taliban and are disturbed by reports that arms and other war *matériel* are continuing to enter Afghanistan, thereby allowing the two parties to prepare their spring offensive. Given the situation, we believe that the Council should demand that the fighting be halted. The parties must be convinced to hold talks with a view to a verifiable and lasting ceasefire.

My second comment relates to the quest for a solution to the conflict. The Afghan parties must understand that there is no military solution to the Afghan conflict. Only a negotiated political settlement aimed at the establishment of a multi-ethnic and fully representative government acceptable to all Afghans will lead to peace and national reconciliation. Accordingly, we support the efforts of the Organization of the Islamic Conference to bring the Afghan parties together at Jeddah, and we encourage the "six plus two" group in its efforts to revitalize that process. We believe also that peace initiatives by the non-belligerent Afghan parties, such as the Rome, Cyprus and Tokyo processes, should also be supported. In this context, the United Nations must continue to play a central and impartial role.

My third comment relates to the critical humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. It is difficult to get assistance delivered; the critical situation of many civilians is intensifying; the number of displaced persons has increased; there is food insecurity for the majority of Afghans; and many people are in a very precarious situation. It is thus imperative that the Afghan parties, particularly the Taliban, take the necessary measures to ensure the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian supplies to all those in need, and they must stop interfering with the activities of the United Nations and other international humanitarian organizations. We welcome the efforts of neighbouring countries for the freely-agreed-to repatriation of Afghans who are currently in their territory, and we encourage them to continue providing aid and protection when necessary.

Fourthly, with respect to the human rights situation in Afghanistan, we deem unacceptable the forced displacement of civilians, summary executions, arbitrary detention and forced labour, restrictions on the mobility of women and girls, the recruitment of child soldiers and all violations of human rights and of international humanitarian law.

Fifthly, Mali strongly supports the resolve of the Security Council to combat terrorism.

My sixth and last comment relates to illicit drug production and trafficking in general and within the context of Afghanistan. As the Secretary-General stressed in his report, we believe this question should be dealt with in a coordinated manner to put an end to the illicit production of drugs in Afghanistan and their illicit trafficking from Afghan territory through the implementation of a detailed and balanced regional plan of action. In this respect, we welcome the major role played by the United Nations Office on Drug Control and Crime Prevention, and we commend the invaluable work of the "six plus two" group in that connection.

The presidential statement we will be adopting at the end of this meeting covers all of these aspects and contains a strong, clear and consistent message, which my delegation fully endorses.

In conclusion, I should like to commend Mr. Vendrell of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan and the international humanitarian organizations for their efforts.

The President: I thank the representative of Mali for the kind words he addressed to me.

Mr. Kamal (Malaysia): I too would like to join those who spoke before me in conveying our deepest sympathy and condolences to the delegation of Tunisia on the demise of President Bourguiba.

We wish also to congratulate you, Sir, and your delegation on your assumption of the presidency of the Council this month, and we would like to thank Ambassador Chowdhury and the delegation of Bangladesh for guiding the Council's work last month to a successful conclusion.

My delegation would like once again to welcome Minister Axworthy to preside over this very important and timely meeting. We express our appreciation to Canada for convening this formal meeting of the Council on the issue of Afghanistan. The immediate aim of the international community is to undertake the difficult task of providing humanitarian relief to the long-suffering Afghan people, who are caught in an armed-conflict situation. Its longer-term aim is, of course, to work towards a political resolution of the Afghan problem and the rehabilitation and reconstruction of that war-torn country.

We would like also to thank Ambassador Listre for his briefing just now and for the work he has accomplished in his capacity as Chairman of the sanctions Committee on Afghanistan. We thank also Mr. John Renninger, Officer-in-Charge, Asia and the Pacific Division, Department of Political Affairs, for his insightful briefing.

We would also like to take this opportunity to commend the work done by the former Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi. The peace settlement that has eluded us is not for want of effort or initiative on his part. It is a reflection of the complex nature of the problem, which revolves around the seemingly irreconcilable differences of the various warring factions and is intertwined with the geo-strategic interests of Afghanistan's neighbours. We would like to extend our full support to Mr. Francesc Vendrell, the newly appointed Personal Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA), as he takes up his challenging appointment and attempts to hammer out a negotiated settlement under the auspices of the United Nations.

The heavy toll exacted on Afghanistan and its people following the long and debilitating war weighs heavily on the mind of the international community. This impoverished country can ill afford to squander its scarce resources on the war effort. As a result, Afghanistan has been consigned to the backwaters of economic development, with dire consequences for the long-suffering Afghans, regardless of their ethnicity and political orientation.

Among the debilitating effects of the armed conflict in Afghanistan is the fact that vast tracts of the country have been sown with landmines that have claimed many lives and limbs. It is estimated that about 10 million landmines have been laid in Afghanistan, making it the most heavily mined country in the world. Such is the legacy bequeathed by the belligerents of the most recent Afghan war. This is further compounded by other social ills, not the least of which are the pernicious effects of drugs, guns and violence and the fact that an entire population is dependent on handouts from the international community. In addition to these ills are the catastrophic effects related to the so-called internally displaced persons, who are, in fact, refugees in their own country as a result of the long war, exacerbating an already grave humanitarian situation.

We are also mindful of the effects of the protracted war on the children of the land — the lost generation that is growing up with no memory of life in a peaceful state — many of whom are illiterate. Thousands of children die each year from malnutrition, respiratory infections and other diseases. Children are by no means the only vulnerable sector of society. The maternal mortality rate is one of the highest in the world.

Malaysia is totally against practices of gender discrimination. It is deplorable that Afghan women have been denied their right to education, as indicated in the Secretary-General's report. This right, as well as the right to earn a living and to enjoy participation in other facets of life, are very much compatible with Islam, which promotes such rights. We believe that women have the legitimate right and obligation to play a constructive role in society, including in the realm of nation-building.

We commend the Canadian presidency for making human security the thrust of this month's deliberations. In this regard, the Taliban's recent intrusions into United Nations premises in Kandahar, in violation of the inviolable United Nations principle of diplomatic immunity, is to be deplored. The incident dramatized the risks faced by well-meaning humanitarian workers in the performance of their duties in areas of armed conflict. The subsequent withdrawal of international staff, including the non-governmental organizations, has set back relief efforts in an already difficult environment. We recall the murder in 1998 of Lieutenant-Colonel Carmine Calo of Italy, an UNSMA official, as well as other, Afghan employees of the United Nations. We pay tribute to them for their sacrifices in the service of mankind.

My delegation deeply regrets the lack of progress made by the Taliban in bringing to justice those responsible for the murder of the Iranian diplomats and journalist in Mazar-e Sharif in August 1998. We are dismayed at the apparent lack of cooperation extended by the Taliban to the United Nations.

We reaffirm our belief that a durable peace can be achieved only through political negotiations and not by military means. We therefore strongly support efforts, under the auspices of the United Nations, for a negotiated settlement through dialogue and the formation of a broad-based, multi-ethnic and fully representative government. In this regard, we strongly encourage early follow-up to the Organization of the Islamic Conference meeting in Jeddah and the Rome process.

It is incumbent upon the Afghan parties to recognize that the search for peace must start with a sustained political will to reach a negotiated settlement, free from external influence. It is regrettable that, despite the lofty principles of the Tashkent Declaration, external military support continues to be received by the contending Afghan parties, thereby fuelling the war indefinitely.

It is clear that the people of Afghanistan are weary of the war and wish to end the cycle of violence as soon as possible so that they can pick up the pieces of their shattered lives. It is imperative that the country's major ethnic and religious groups cooperate among themselves to decide on their own leadership rather than have one imposed on them. In this regard, we are of the view that the Rome process — that is, the convening of the grand assembly, or *loya jirgah*, which is the embodiment of this mechanism — should be encouraged, as it can contribute to the overall peace process.

Barely six months after sanctions were imposed on the Taliban, we are beginning to hear talk about further measures to be imposed on Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. Sanctions, when imposed as a matter of necessity, must have certain safeguards so as to mitigate the unintended consequences on the civilian population. Therefore, before additional measures can be considered, it is imperative for the Council to evaluate the impact of the ongoing sanctions. We wish to remind the Council that, contrary to requirements, there was no analysis made of the possible impact of sanctions before they were imposed on the Taliban. In the absence of that pre-assessment of the impact of the sanctions, it is important that periodic impact assessments be carried out, as provided for in paragraph 6 (c) of resolution 1267 (1999), which the Council unanimously adopted. This provides the Council with the ability to modify the sanctions regime if and when it is deemed necessary to do so.

The ongoing war has contributed to continuing human rights violations, sustained interference by foreign Powers and far-reaching environmental damage, not to mention the staggering social cost of the long civil war. Afghanistan has become the world's largest producer of illicit drugs. These developments raise serious questions about the commitment of Afghan groups themselves and that of their external supporters to a peaceful resolution of the debilitating conflict. The extent of the humanitarian catastrophe is perhaps more pervasive than we really know. It is imperative, therefore, that every effort be made to ameliorate the plight of the people and to find an early political solution to the conflict.

The President: I thank the representative of Malaysia for the kind words he addressed to me.

Mr. Yel'chenko (Ukraine): I would like to join my colleagues in expressing deepest condolences to the delegation of Tunisia on the passing of former President Bourguiba.

My delegation is pleased to see you, Sir, presiding over the Security Council at this very important meeting. We are aware of the important place that issues of human security occupy in the foreign policy of your country. The problems of the protection of civilians in armed conflict, humanitarian relief programmes for refugees and the protection of women, children and the elderly, who suffer most during conflict, have become an integral part of the Council's agenda due, in part, to the efforts of Canadian diplomacy and of your delegation here in New York. We are convinced, Mr. Foreign Minister, that your personal participation in the work of the Council during this month will provide a fresh outlook to our deliberations on this and other important issues.

During recent decades, the international community has gained bitter experience and seen proof that the primary harmful impact of any armed conflict is on the most vulnerable parts of society. On the other hand, ongoing human suffering is a contributing factor to instability and further conflict. The current situation in Afghanistan is yet further proof of this.

Last month, in informal consultations, the Council thoroughly examined the situation in Afghanistan, including mediation efforts and prospects for the peace process, as well as drug-trafficking-related problems and their impact on the whole region. Today's additional emphasis on the humanitarian aspects of the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan, together with the very informative briefings by Ambassador Listre and by Mr. Renniger, enable our deliberations to be comprehensive.

We note with great concern that the general situation in Afghanistan and the humanitarian situation in particular continue to deteriorate. The Secretary-General's report provides an alarming picture of the Taliban's continued policy of flagrant violations of human rights, maltreatment of the civilian population, forced displacements, summary executions, deliberate abuses and arbitrary detentions, violence and continuing discrimination against girls and women, separation of men from their families and the use of child soldiers. The international community has several times expressed its grave concern over such practices and has condemned them.

Unfortunately, no signs of improvement in the current situation can be seen, and the prospects are rather bleak, considering reports that both parties are preparing to resume fighting. The result of that could be easily foreseen: new heavy losses of human life, increased suffering by the civilian population, new flows of refugees and internally displaced persons, destruction and a further decline in the social sphere and in the economy of the country — which is practically non-existent. Needless to say, the hostilities create insuperable difficulties for the implementation of the international community's humanitarian programmes in that country and pose a threat to international humanitarian personnel.

Here I would like to stress that we need to use all possible means at our disposal to respond properly to the test created by the conflict in Afghanistan in order to bring the parties to peaceful reconciliation and to provide a safe and secure environment for the civilian population.

We are thus convinced that it is very timely to reiterate strongly the Council's position with regard to the situation in Afghanistan. We welcome the draft presidential statement, which conveys the Council's grave concern at the current situation in various fields. It contains a clear and resolute demand that the Taliban cease its abuses of human rights, including the rights of women and girls; halt fighting and hostilities; start negotiations with the aim of achieving peaceful reconciliation; stop rendering support to international terrorism; and comply without delay with resolution 1267 (1999). It also carries the important message that further non-compliance by the Taliban will leave the Security Council with no choice other than to consider the imposition of further targeted measures. We thank the delegation of the Russian Federation for its initiative and its efforts in the preparation of a comprehensive document.

Finally, we once again urge the Afghan parties to cease hostilities. We also urge the members of the "six plus two" group and other mediators to resume their efforts to find a way leading to a final solution to the conflict in Afghanistan.

The President: I thank the representative of Ukraine for the very kind words he addressed to the Canadian delegation.

Mr. Ward (Jamaica): The Jamaican delegation joins in expressing condolences to the Government and the people of Tunisia on the passing of former President Bourguiba. He was indeed an icon of the developing world.

At this, our first formal meeting for the month of April, allow me on behalf of the Jamaican delegation to say how pleased we are to see you, Sir, the Foreign Minister of Canada, presiding over the deliberations of the Security Council. My delegation would like to express its appreciation to Ambassador Chowdhury and to the delegation of Bangladesh for the efficient way in which the work of the Council was conducted during the month of March.

We welcome to the Council Ms. Angela King, Assistant Secretary-General. We thank Mr. John Renninger for briefing us on this very important issue, and we also thank Ambassador Listre for his report on the work of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1267 (1999).

The humanitarian situation and the plight of vulnerable populations in areas of conflict require our vigilant attention. In this instance, the situation has become chronic, and my delegation wishes to place on record its deep concern at the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. Achieving a political settlement of the conflict is the first step towards alleviating the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. Jamaica therefore reiterates the call for a negotiated political settlement to this conflict. It is important that the parties continue dialogue which could lead to the creation of a broad-based coalition government representative of the various ethnic and religious groups. It is critical for this process that the Taliban take its seat at the negotiating table. We believe that the future of Afghanistan lies in this approach.

It is our firm view that the humanitarian efforts of the United Nations must be supported, and that the

necessary resources must be allocated to deal with the crisis that has emerged. We are also concerned about the difficulties that humanitarian agencies face in gaining access to the most vulnerable members of the population. The deplorable activities of the Taliban have led to the withdrawal of international staff from Kandahar, and we call on the Taliban and on all other parties to ensure the safety and security of United Nations personnel working in Afghanistan. My delegation takes this opportunity to commend the efforts of United Nations personnel, who remain dedicated in the most challenging of circumstances.

We reiterate our position that there must be respect for human rights and international humanitarian law, and we feel that those who target civilians and individuals who are most vulnerable must be brought to justice in order to deter gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

The continued violation of human rights in Afghanistan is of great concern to us, especially with regard to the treatment of women and girls. The problems they face are very well known, and include restricted access to education, restricted access to employment outside the home and inadequate access to proper health care. They also suffer from depression and stress due to social displacement, and from increased impoverishment as a result of more than 20 years of conflict. These problems affect the entire population, but have a greater impact on the most powerless members of the society.

We have heard reports of some minor improvements in the treatment of women and girls, and in that regard we would appreciate it if the Assistant Secretary-General, Ms. Angela King, could elaborate on the following: first, the likelihood of further progress being made in the conditions of women and girls; secondly, the steps being taken to safeguard the human rights of Afghan women, including those guilty of human rights violations to justice; thirdly, the existence of programmes designed to promote awareness of human rights among Afghan women; and fourthly, the status of the implementation of recommendations made by United Nations organizations geared towards improving the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan.

We are extremely concerned about the Afghan drug trade and the debilitating effects it has on the population, and about the resulting deterioration of the social fabric that is likely to result. With the range of problems that women and girls face on a daily basis, and with the lack of access to information on the harmful effects of drug use, they are at high risk of dependency and addiction. The use of opium as a medicine to relieve common ailments and other health problems, and to fight depression, is a worrying trend. Nor can we ignore the effect that this problem has on neighbouring countries and on the region as a whole. The situation calls for immediate regional and international action.

We agree that the "six plus two" group could make a useful contribution to drug-related problems and that the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention should play a key role in facilitating its activities in this respect. Their exchange of views on how best to address the drug-related issues in a coordinated manner, with a view to eliminating drug production and trafficking out of Afghanistan through a comprehensive and balanced regional action plan, is one which we support.

In this regard, Jamaica fully supports the draft presidential statement before us today.

The President: I thank the representative of Jamaica for his kind words addressed to me.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Canada.

Let me begin by thanking those who have welcomed me to the Council Chamber. I appreciate their remarks. I also want to thank Mr. John Renninger for his sombre but informative briefing on the situation in Afghanistan, and Ambassador Listre for his very important report.

Of course, I would like very much to welcome Angela King to our proceedings. Her presence here, I think, underlines an important aspect of the conflict, which preys upon the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan. Their plight demonstrates again today how, in armed conflict, it is the civilians who suffer most. And, as for all victims of armed conflict, the Council bears responsibility for their protection.

The comments of so many speakers today have made it plain that, in Afghanistan, the only unambiguous reality after two decades of civil war, destruction, brutality, violence and deprivation is that Afghan civilians — women, men and children — suffer most from this endless and senseless conflict.

All aspects of this conflict are reprehensible. Some, however, stand out more than others. Some 5 to 7

million anti-personnel landmines are strewn indiscriminately across Afghanistan. They have limited military significance, but continue to kill or maim more than a dozen Afghan civilians every day. The United Nations Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan is making considerable efforts to rid the country of these horrible weapons, yet the Secretary-General's most recent report indicates that new mining is under way, negating those de-mining efforts and in flagrant violation of the provisions of the Ottawa Convention.

Interference with humanitarian operations, particularly the denial of safe and unhindered access to affected populations, imperils the lives of those dependent on such operations for food and medical care. It is only through the efforts of United Nations agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and various non-governmental groups that famine has been averted. At a minimum, it is essential that humanitarian operations in Afghanistan be allowed to continue if the war is not to claim hundreds of thousands more victims, directly or indirectly.

Perhaps most disturbing is the Taliban's systematic pattern of violation of the human rights of half the population — women and girls — a violation which the Taliban misrepresent as having a religious foundation. The interdiction on women travelling for any purpose except in the company of a close male relative has been rigorously and, indeed, brutally enforced by the Taliban's virtue and vice squads. Women daring to transgress their ordinances are subject to harsh punishment, including public beatings and torture, but those who obey are virtual prisoners and still subject to harassment and physical abuse.

Restrictions on women's mobility, first introduced in Kabul and other cities by the United Front and retained or extended by the Taliban since their seizure of control, not only deprive women of their human rights and the most basic degree of personal autonomy, but also impede — as we have heard so often today — their access to employment, education and health care.

These restrictions are a matter not of mere neglect, but of active, directed policy. They have compound effects on the situation of women and girls. Maternal mortality rates in Afghanistan are the second highest in the world and, while overall literacy rates are estimated at 30 per cent, for females this number is 13 per cent.

I note in reports that we have heard today that there has been a modest, if localized amelioration, with the Taliban permitting home-schooling for girls, for example. This incremental progress needs to be redoubled, however, if it is to represent even a first step towards meeting the minimal standards required by the international community.

It is fair to say that people around the world are outraged over the treatment of women and girls in Afghanistan. Canadians are no exception. Two years ago, I personally delivered some 5,000 letters from Canadians to the Secretary-General expressing their concerns about the situation in Afghanistan. A group of concerned Canadians recently formed a National Coalition in Support of Afghan Women, which is working to mobilize worldwide action to address the status of women in Afghanistan. If I might add a personal note, this initiative is very much in keeping with the engagement of individual Canadian women in promoting human rights, such as that of the late Mrs. Rae Scott, a prominent activist whose memorial service is being held today. I hope that today's discussion is a justification for the active work that she did over the years.

I am also pleased to announce that, in that same spirit, Canada will provide $300,000 through the United Nations trust fund for human rights to support activities of local and international non-governmental organizations involved in human rights training and programming to benefit Afghan women and girls.

What is very clear is that Afghanistan has joined the small but growing number of countries where the State has disintegrated, leaving a vacuum. The Taliban claim to be a bona fide Government, but behave as a criminal gang, harbouring international terrorists and allowing their country to become the world's largest exporter of illegal opiates. The acceptance they crave must be earned through national reconciliation, the formation of a broad-based and representative Government, the end of tolerance for terrorism and drug trafficking and, above all, through respect for human rights, including women's human rights.

I have spoken of the civil war in Afghanistan. However, it was a foreign invasion that touched off the war, which has been sustained for two decades by material support from various foreign sources. The "six plus two" group has a special responsibility in bringing a peaceful solution to the Afghan conflict. Regrettably, as the Secretary-General's most recent report notes, certain members of this group pay lip service to the objective of peace and continue to support the belligerents. While it

is true that only the Afghans themselves can bring peace to their country, members of the "six plus two" can make a difference in their ability to wage war.

The Security Council has a vital role to play in Afghanistan. There are concrete actions it can take to address the situation. It can insist on full and unhindered access to affected populations by United Nations and associated personnel, the ICRC and other humanitarian personnel, and on guarantees for the safety and security of such staff. It can demand that all parties acquit their responsibilities towards the entire civilian population, with particular attention to restoring the human rights of women. It can demand an immediate end to hostilities, the beginning of honest negotiations and the involvement of the good offices of the Secretary-General and his Personal Representative in the search for peace and national reconciliation. It can look for ways to pressure the warring factions to the negotiating table. Finally, it can consider measures to cut off the supply of weapons to belligerents. I believe that most of these recommendations are contained in the presidential statement.

In October 1999, the Security Council adopted a resolution condemning the Taliban for its harbouring of Usama bin Laden and calling for the imposition of sanctions if the Taliban failed to deliver the indicted terrorist to the appropriate authorities. Canada's support of that resolution is founded on our firm opposition to acts of terrorism, but we recognize that it is also important — and we expressed this view — that the Council show similar commitment in addressing the serious humanitarian and human rights situation in that country.

The discussion today and the presidential statement we will adopt today should underline further the Council's profound dismay with the continued suffering of the Afghan people and our determination to press forward in exploring means to usefully contribute to a resolution of the conflict.

I shall now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

The next speaker is the representative of Afghanistan, on whom I now call.

Mr. Farhâdi (Afghanistan): Habib Bourguiba was a leader of his country and his people, to whom we express our fraternal condolences. Moreover, he was a leader in Asia and Africa. I have personally been a witness to that fact. May God bestow on him His immense charity and kindness.

We are happy you are here, Mr. President, presiding over this meeting. Let me thank you for all Canada has done in favour of peace in Afghanistan. Your statement on behalf of Canada is highly representative of your views.

We thank very much and appreciate the efforts and leadership of Mr. Anwarul Karim Chowdhury, who, in the course of the month of March, presided over the Council.

We support the content of document S/2000/205, of 10 March 2000, on the situation in Afghanistan. We thank Mr. Renninger of the Secretariat for his comprehensive briefing. We appreciate the services of Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, who deployed so many efforts for peace in Afghanistan and we assure the United Nations of our full cooperation with Mr. Francesc Vendrell, who has been in charge of Afghanistan issues recently. We thank Ambassador Listre of Argentina, who heads the Afghan sanctions Committee, for the work he has done.

I would like to thank you, Mr. President, and Council members for their constant service and their interest in Afghanistan, which was eloquently expressed in the statements of Council members.

The Afghan nation is suffering, especially civilians, and women and girls most particularly.

The involvement of mercenary combatants in Afghanistan is an awful fact. These mercenaries come from religious schools in Pakistan. This was also stated by the Secretariat representative here. This is despite the political change in Pakistan in the month of October. The miliary junta in Pakistan is the main policy maker in Pakistan and of course also had the upper hand in previous civil Government with regard to Afghanistan. Afghanistan affairs were and remain in the hands of the army in Pakistan, especially of the military intelligence, called Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). They have established training camps on the territory of Afghanistan for terrorists, and these training camps are still there. Pakistan still hopes for a military solution in Afghanistan. This is why it is sending arms and ammunition to the Taliban. Their logistical support for the Taliban continues even now.

The military regime in Pakistan continues to use extremist religious groups for its political purposes in the region and beyond. This policy has created a major concern for all the countries of the region. We are firmly

convinced that this policy of Pakistan is not only harmful to the Afghan people, but that it will also be a major obstacle to peace and stability in Pakistan and to the creation of a stable Pakistan as a prosperous nation. The Afghan people are very much in favour of peace and prosperity in Pakistan.

The Islamic State of Afghanistan welcomes today's presidential statement, which has been drafted and will be adopted by the Council very soon, I hope. As made clear in the text of that statement, the Islamic State of Afghanistan is ready to agree to a complete cessation of armed conflict and expects the resolution of the Afghan problem to be based on the establishment in Afghanistan of a representative, broad-based Government which represents all the major ethnic groups. There is no military solution to the Afghan crisis, as was practically proved during the course of the last five years.

We highly appreciate the efforts of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and express our readiness to help towards the success of OIC efforts.

We are grateful to Council members for having clearly condemned all previous Taliban press statements on the recent military offensive of 1 March 2000. In fact, our military intelligence reports show that the Taliban and their Pakistani military advisers are very busy preparing the launch of a new military offensive in the spring. This was also explained by the Secretary-General's representative. In such an atmosphere, we are sure that in the presidential statement to be adopted today by the Council will serve as a timely warning to the Taliban and to their Pakistani junta supporters. They must be aware that the international community cannot remain idle in the face of such an aggressive and systematically bellicose attitude.

The President: I thank the representative of Afghanistan for his kind words addressed to me.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, and in the absence of objection, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Ms. Angela King, Assistant Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite Ms. King to take a seat at the Council table.

I now give the floor to Ms. King to respond to the comments and questions that were issued by members of the Council.

Ms. King: At the outset, Mr. President, I am honoured by your invitation to answer the Council's questions today on the situation of Afghan women and girls. I am most grateful to you for the invitation, and to your Government, and to all those who have consistently provided strong support in incorporating a gender perspective in all aspects of work of the Security Council, including peacemaking and peace-building.

I would also like to say that perhaps today we would not be having this discussion had it not been for the very bold landmark decision of the Council, on 8 March of this year, to incorporate women and girls in all the deliberations of the Council, not just as victims of armed conflict, but also as constructive actors in finding peace. In this regard, I would like to pay a special tribute to Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury for his leadership in this regard, as he was president of the Security Council on 8 March.

Now I would like to turn to some of the questions that were asked. On the issue of the participation of women in civil society, I would strongly suggest that the policy followed by many United Nations agencies — for example the World Food Council, Habitat, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and others — on the principled approach to participation in all aspects of the work of the United Nations and of the projects which we are carrying out, not only to develop the country but for humanitarian assistance, should be continued and fostered.

We find that at the community level, particularly in some rural areas, there is less resistance to women's participation. Although, as we have heard from many speakers, that policy is applied in a somewhat erratic way, it is very important to build on these entry points. For example, some of the projects that have involved women and men in decision-making at these levels have encouraged women's decision-making on where to place a well, because it is the girls in society who have the chore of collecting water and bringing it back to the villages. So, if you place a well far from a home-based school, that means that during school hours the girls will not be going to that home-based school.

Other decisions concern the type of vegetables and seeds they need in order to grow food for their families.

There is a very successful project that has been run by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) (UNCHS) that has drawn men and women together at the local level for sewage disposal and other questions of sanitation within the communities. There are also community councils, and in the inter-agency mission we found some mullahs in Herat and elsewhere who are very open to the participation of women in terms of giving their opinions and seeking their opinions and passing on their advice, sometimes through the mulluhs, to the men of the village.

For civil society and civil participation, electoral education is needed, also education in tolerance and ideas of democracy, including knowledge of the United Nations Charter, the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Some of the mechanics of learning how to identify key issues — for example, how to end war, how to get education for children and how to lobby for their needs — are also very important for women to learn at this level if they are to fully participate in the civil action of society. Some of the local non-governmental organizations are already doing this, as are some of the agencies, but this needs far greater financial assistance, and I think that this should be strongly encouraged by the Council.

Above all, the Council and other forums such as the Commission on Human Rights and the Commission on the Status of Women have kept this issue alive, and they must continue to press for the full enjoyment of the rights of women and children, not only for education, health and employment, but in all other areas. The special rapporteurs of the Commission on Human Rights, and the transmission and promulgation of the findings of their reports, are particularly important.

With regard to how women can seek employment: it is one thing to seek employment; it is another to have employment available. I think that one of the strategies could be for more ministries to be opened up to women. For example, we have recently had reports that women are now being employed — I think about 70 of them — in the Ministry for Social Affairs. This could be opened up, if the Taliban and other authorities are encouraged, to other ministries such as Health, Education and so on.

I would also urge that in Kandahar and Kabul, which are the main locales for decision-making, machinery for the advancement of women should be established, either in terms of a regional unit, a bureau of women's affairs or even a ministry of women's affairs. This can be a focal point within the existing authorities to spread the word and to join the mainstream, and it can also be a focal point for the United Nations agencies.

With regard to seeking better treatment, this is also very difficult and depends very much on the political climate. If there is no political solution, it will be very unlikely that women and girls will really have their situation improved. Very often those who do speak out, we are told, are subject to intimidation, and to harsh and swift retribution in some cases, not only for themselves but for their families.

As one of those with the inter-agency team two years ago, I visited two prisons, one exclusively for women and one where there were women and men but in separate establishments. I would urge that we think in terms of a holistic view; seeking employment and seeking rights has to be within the context of an overall enabling environment where women can do this. With regard to the prisons, one of them had 13 women and some children, some of whom had been born while the women were in prison. There were no sanitary facilities because the current toilets were situated in a part of the building that had been mined. This was in Kandahar.

Emphasis should also be placed by all United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations on giving women in the home-based schools and girls, through textbooks translated into local languages, knowledge of the basic human rights instruments and of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which, incidentally, a former Afghan Government signed, but which Afghanistan has not ratified. They should also have knowledge, as soon as these are developed, of the procedures under the optional protocol to that Convention, through which individual women or groups of women can transmit their complaints directly to this CEDAW committee for investigation and action.

I will strongly suggest that in this connection the United Nations agencies also take a lead and set an example in having more women in those agencies, and at high levels, and in having women particularly from those countries with similar traditional and cultural norms, with a good knowledge of gender equality and of human rights, who might be able to draw on aspects of Koranic and Islamic law and its relation to other instruments of human rights. In this regard, considerable work has been done with non-governmental organizations, academic

groups, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in drawing these distinctions between shariah law, Islamic law and the Convention. We hope that this will encourage the Taliban to see these issues in their true perspective.

Other ways might include further urging United Nations agencies to incorporate gender in all projects. Some outstanding examples are the peace projects of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

A project was also planned by the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) in Helmand to create alternative means of livelihood by rebuilding a wool factory as an alternative means to drugs. This was to be done jointly with the Taliban authorities, giving work to 1,300 people. The United Nations Drug Programme insisted, as part of the blueprint, that of those 1,300 at least 200 should be women. Regrettably, this project has not yet got off the ground, but it represents the kind of creative thinking that could go some way towards meeting the challenge posed by this issue.

With regard to the question on the Gender Adviser, I must say here that I greatly welcome the United Kingdom's support for the United Nations Gender Adviser and also the announcement that you, Mr. President, just made about its generous contribution to this work in Afghanistan. Some of what the Gender Adviser has done is to create a gender plan of action. This has taken place at the policy level and at the programming level. Contacts have been established within the United Nations donor system and with women's non-governmental organizations and Afghan women. There has been direct training of United Nations staff, many of whom, as noted in the original report, had no real concept of what human rights and gender rights stood for in the United Nations system.

The Gender Adviser, with the strong support of the United Nations Coordinator and the Human Rights Adviser — also part of that report's recommendations — has also identified the United Nations system's need for gender-related interventions — finding what the entry points are, looking around to see what projects are working and seeing if they can be replicated in other areas.

Initial contacts have also been established directly by the United Nations Coordinator and the Gender Adviser with Afghan authorities in Kabul and Kandahar. There has also been an upgrading of the capacity of United Nations programming staff to address gender-related issues in Afghanistan.

These are some of the issues which the Gender Adviser has been engaged with. She has also participated in workshops with United Nations agencies such as the World Bank and in other bilateral initiatives.

One of the important things in terms of this very, very modest shift we have seen in the last 18 months relates to the Mahram edict. The Gender Adviser, for example, is from one of those countries where there is strict application of the Mahram edict, which implies that any woman from a Muslim country, whether international staff or not, has to be accompanied in her daily job by a male family member. This has not been applied in her case, and we now have at least five or six other women — United Nations international staff — who are also from those countries and who are also working without any restrictions.

The representative of Jamaica wanted to know the likelihood of further progress. In my view, further progress, if based on the very incrementally slow progress that we have seen over the last two and a half years, is going to be equally slow unless there is a strong, negotiated peace. I believe that in the deliberations held at the political level, whether by the United Nations or other international agencies or on a bilateral scale, sometimes the issue of gender is very low on the list of priorities or is totally forgotten. I think that we cannot do that; we cannot allow that to happen.

There is another factor affecting the rate of change: the fact that in many United Nations agencies and delegations there are very few women. So we are going to instruct the Taliban to have 50 per cent women or to include more women in their projects and in decision-making, and the United Nations has a united male front. I think that we have to take this rather seriously.

On the issue of steps in the area of human rights, I think that I have addressed that. The existence of programme awareness has also, I think, been covered to some extent.

In terms of the status of project implementation, training is taking place. Some advisers have been appointed, but there is still quite a lot to be done in terms of evaluation, in terms of looking very carefully at the projects from a gender perspective and of seeing to what

extent they are affecting the country and whether they are really bringing about any change.

I would like to close by saying that we should perhaps take into account, in the progress that has been made, the fact that on 8 March 2000, for the very first time in the recent history of Afghanistan, a formal public celebration of International Women's Day was held in Kabul, the capital. Seven hundred women of all ages, including former university professors, engineers, teachers, doctors, nurses and school principals, attended the celebration. Ten of them were honoured with gifts from the organizers of the celebration — the United Nations system, working in very close collaboration with the Taliban authorities. The representative of Mullah Omar made a statement at the celebration. Radio Shariah, the official radio station, covered the event, and permission was given to a wide cross-section of international media to cover the event and conduct random interviews with the women present. At the end of the celebration, it was announced that six women prisoners would be released in celebration of the Day. Two had children living with them in prison. I might add that the daily ration for the women and children is two loaves of bread a day, and I saw the loaves.

To conclude, I would not say that this is cause for euphoria, but I do think that there has been some progress and that with continued pressure from the Council and its members in other forums — the Afghan support group, the United Nations Secretariat — progress can be made. But at the heart of this is a political settlement that is firmly grounded in human rights and gender.

The President: On behalf of the Council, I should like to thank Ms. King for her very helpful clarification and response to these important questions.

I now give the floor to Mr. Renninger to respond to the comments made during the course of these Council proceedings.

Mr. Renninger: I am very conscious of the lateness of the hour. I do not think there were any specific questions directed to me, but I would be remiss if I did not, on behalf of the Secretary-General, express our gratitude for the many expressions of support and encouragement we heard during the debate today.

The President: I would like to thank Mr. Renninger for his awareness of the time, and for his very concise answers.

The representative of Tunisia has asked for the floor.

Mr. Jerandi (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me once again to express our sincere thanks to you personally, Sir, the Foreign Minister of Canada, and to all the members of the Security Council, for the condolences that they have expressed to the Government and the people of Tunisia on the passing of Habib Bourguiba, the first President of our Republic.

The President: I think that the representative of Tunisia understands just how strongly the passing of his great leader has been felt. I know that it has been felt around the world.

There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The next meeting of the Security Council to continue consideration of this agenda item will take place immediately following the adjournment of this meeting.

The meeting rose at 2.30 p.m.